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# Holy Visit 1996: Prophecy, Revitalization, and Resistance in the Contemporary Navajo World

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**Abstract.** In the spring of 1996 supernaturals visited the Navajo homeland to deliver a prophetic message of potential import to all Navajo people. In response, thousands of Navajo made pilgrimages to the site, while others had ceremonies conducted in their home communities and ceremonial practitioners made pilgrimages to the Navajo sacred mountains. In national recognition of the event, the Navajo Nation Unity Day of Prayer was established. Details of the Holy Visit of 1996 and activities that have transpired in response to it are contextualized within anthropological analyses of revitalization movements, as well as Navajo oral history, historical accounts of similar events in the Navajo world, and information about various forms of resistance to the incident and events resulting from it. This comparative frame allows evaluation of how this incipient revitalization movement correlates with or diverges from Navajo responses to similar events in the past and such phenomena worldwide.

*The next thing I knew there was a loud boom overhead and then a whistle. It sounded like someone was talking outside so I went out to see what was going on and saw two white-haired, older Navajo men. . . . I got scared and started to go back into the house when one of them said: "Don't be afraid, we are here to help you. You already know what we're here for."* —Sarah Begay, cited in Salt Lake Tribune, 17 May 1996.

*These Holy Ones told her they had come to ask where all the people had gone, for no one was leaving offerings of corn pollen and stones [ntł'iz] at the sacred places anymore.* —High Country News, 5 August 1996

*Part of the warning concerned the four sacred mountains, and implied that the absence of traditional offerings being made there by Navajos was causing the current drought.* —Hopi Tutuveni, 24 May 1996

*[The visitors asked] why the deities no longer are receiving prayers from the people. They warned that if the Navajos continue to forsake tribal traditions, they face grave danger in the future, and Navajo deities would not be able to help.*  
—Arizona Republic, 28 May 1996

On 3 May 1996, amid the worst drought of the century in the Four Corners region, an event considered by many Navajo people to be of profound significance to all members of the Navajo Nation occurred at Rocky Ridge, an isolated area near Hard Rock, Arizona, on Hopi Partitioned Land in the former Navajo-Hopi Joint Use Area.<sup>1</sup> Two members of the *Diyin Dine'é* (Holy People) visited the home of Sarah Begay and her ninety-six-year-old mother, Irene Yazzie, with a series of prophetic messages concerning four areas of laxity on the part of Navajo people.<sup>2</sup> In the view of these *Diyin Dine'é*, Navajo people have been negligent in their responsibilities regarding prayers and offerings; *k'éí* (relatives and others with whom one has peaceful, friendly relations); language and culture; and nature (*Navajo Times*, 23 May 1996). After delivering stern warnings the Holy People disappeared, leaving only four moccasin prints encircled by a finely ground substance at the location where they had stood.

Flustered by the incident, Mrs. Begay recalls, "I seemed to have been running in circles at the house, not knowing what to do afterwards" (Anonymous elder #1 1996). She decided to drive to the home of her closest neighbors, a ceremonial practitioner and his wife, to seek their assistance. Upon learning of the visitation,

The couple rushed off to her home. . . . The medicine man attempted to find in which direction the visitors went or might have left. The couple looked around the house and around the place where the visitors were standing. No tracks of movement were found. No tracks were found to indicate which direction the two beings went.

Knowing that there was a meeting at the community house, the lady [Sarah Begay] instructed the medicine man to "Go to the meeting and inform the community of the visitation here." He drove off to relay the incident. Soon afterward, he returned. Shortly after a trail of vehicles descended on her house. "In a very short time, a lot of people were here," she added.

The footprints of the two visitors were found at the place where they stood. The footprints were of moccasins. An outline of white cornmeal encircled the footprints. Some people said it was white clay and others said it was white cornmeal. After a close examination by several of the people, it was noted that the white powder was finely ground white cornmeal.

A young male person stated, "Do not leave the incident at that. We need to find out from them why they visited. Ask through hand-trembling.<sup>3</sup> One of you knows how to find information through using your hands. A few of you are sitting here among us," he stated. A person volunteered to conduct the ceremony. Through the ceremony, it was stated, "The visitors were of the Holy People." Different hand-tremblers were used on site and they all agreed with the same results, that the visitors were members of the Holy People. (Anonymous elder #1 1996)<sup>4</sup>

The *ndilniihii* (traditional diagnosticians expert at the hand-trembling method) who were consulted verified that the visit was real and, on the basis of Mrs. Begay's description, identified the visitors as *Haashch'éélti'i* (Talking God) and *Haashch'éé'ooghaan* (House Talking God).

Owing to their visit, Mrs. Begay's role in life altered; she became a *bit'áhoot'íid* (visionary). The significance of this shift lies in the fact that one of the culturally sanctioned means by which ceremonial innovation can occur is through the actions of a Navajo visionary. Prophetic visions are not considered aberrant in the Navajo world; in fact, some people maintain that the holes at the top of the backboards of traditional cradles are intended as a means to inculcate in the children who use them the ability to have prophetic visions (Knoki-Wilson 1992). The experiences of visionaries such as Sarah Begay hold an important place in Navajo history because they have established paradigms for how individual Navajo can become vested with the power to perform new ceremonies and to educate apprentices in their performance.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the month of May, news of the Holy Visit at Rocky Ridge quickly disseminated across the vast area of Navajo country, which spans parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado.<sup>6</sup> As word spread, the status of the location at which the prophetic incident occurred shifted from an isolated homesite to a shrine, with the "footprints" serving as the requisite center for a pilgrimage space (see Dubisch 1995: 35–38 on pilgrimage sites).<sup>7</sup> Vehicles of all shapes and sizes began making their ways from every corner of the reservation to the Begay/Yazzie home, as thousands of the nearly 220,000 members of the Navajo Nation (some from as far away as Canada) made pilgrimages to the remote location. By mid-May six thousand people had reportedly made the trek down treacherous dirt roads to visit the site and make offerings (*Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 May 1996; *Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996) and Albert Hale, president of the Navajo Nation, had requested that it be designated as a permanent Navajo shrine (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996). On Monday, 20 May 1996, Ferrell Secakuku,

chairman of the Hopi Tribal Council, visited the site and heard the story of the visit directly from members of the Begay family (*Arizona Republic*, 28 May 1996).

Though significant and noteworthy, this is not an isolated occurrence. Visitations by supernaturals, prophetic messages, and the transformative movements frequently originating from them have a long history in Native America in general and in the Navajo world specifically, as they do globally. Such phenomena have held a prominent place in the realm of academic interest since James Mooney's seminal study of the Ghost Dance religion (1896) launched a century of scholarly investigations in societies throughout Native America and elsewhere in the world.<sup>8</sup> The time-depth of this concern notwithstanding, Native American prophets and prophecies have had a contested history in academic discourse. By some accounts, scholars have all but ignored the powerful role played by prophets in Native American communities and in the course of American Indian history (Trafzer 1985: 233–35) while focusing almost exclusively on the transformative social movements frequently associated with them and their prophecies.

Researchers have studied transformative movements among social groups worldwide under the rubrics of “revitalistic movements,” which emphasize the institution of customs, values, and even aspects of nature that are thought to have been practiced by previous generations but are not currently present; “cargo cults,” which emphasize the importation of foreign values, practices, and goods; “millenarian movements,” which emphasize an apocalyptic transformation to be engineered by the supernatural; or “nativistic movements,” which attempt either to revive extinct or moribund elements of culture or to perpetuate current elements in the culture and are characterized by strong emphasis on the elimination of alien persons, customs, values, and/or materials. In spite of these seemingly endless attempts at categorization, any given transformative movement, such as the incipient movement resulting from the Holy Visit of 1996 on the Navajo reservation, may simultaneously manifest nativistic, cargo, millenarian, or revitalistic elements.

These various phenomena have been collectively subsumed under the label “revitalization movements.” In his now classic study of such movements, Anthony F. C. Wallace (1956) established a model for what he considered to be their universal characteristics. Accordingly, revitalization movements are seen consistently to involve conscious change, proceed through certain stages—steady state, stress, cultural distortion, revitalization, and finally a new steady state (*ibid.*)—and be linked to “relative deprivation” (Barber 1941; Wallace 1956; Aberle 1959, 1962) or “oppression” (Lanternari 1963).<sup>9</sup>

Historically, the research focus of the majority of historians and anthropologists whose interests lie in such phenomena as they occur in Native American societies has centered primarily on whether individual prophetic movements are indigenous or a response to the pressures of European colonialism (Kehoe 1989: 101–11, 121–27; Cruickshank 1994: 148; Vibert 1995: 197–99). Experience shows, however, that deprivation or oppression alone (relative, colonial, or otherwise) does not guarantee adoption of a transformative movement.<sup>10</sup>

More recently research focus has shifted from examination of such factors to elucidation of internal cultural logics, as scholars have come to realize that it is essential to consider the systems and practices that give such religious phenomena the requisite coherence to “make good sense” in the native societies under investigation within broader contexts such as the oppression of colonialism or various sources of deprivation (DeMallie 1982; Cruickshank 1994; Vibert 1995: 199). Taking this one step further, native exegeses are foregrounded in this essay to shed light on how Navajo people use oral traditions to make connections between the past and the present as well as to establish outlines for the future; elucidate the various systems of belief and practice that give the Holy Visit of 1996 resonance in Navajo society; and highlight some of the complex and contested points of view about this prophetic incident, and the events that have transpired in direct response to it, which collectively offer insight into why it simultaneously “makes sense” to some Navajo people while it “does not make sense” to other Navajo people.

The role of prophecy as a form of ancestral knowledge is established through a brief examination of Navajo oral history. Then, drawing on evidence of prophecy in the Navajo world from the early twentieth century to the present (Hewett 1936; Watson 1937; Haile 1940: 359; Kluckhohn 1942: 60–61; Brugge 1980; Bailey and Bailey 1982), incidents such as the Holy Visit of 1996 are contextualized historically to document how ceremonial innovations may originate from the dreams or visions of contemporary people; to demonstrate that prophecy and the movements resulting from it at various times during the period under consideration have been powerful intellectual responses to multiple stresses including droughts, epidemics, and social change; and to illustrate how this recent incident fits with or diverges from previous visitations that have occurred during this century. The personal narratives contained within this essay directly link this prophetic incident to the various multidimensional stresses—severe drought conditions, prolonged social and spiritual upheaval resulting from the Navajo-Hopi land dispute, and behavioral deprivation evidenced by a “pervasive feeling that people do not behave as they should, or as they

once did" (Aberle 1962: 211)—which are currently being experienced by Navajo people. Ultimately, native exegeses reveal that to attain understanding, it is essential to consider the internal logic that allows the visitation at Rocky Ridge and the various reactions of Navajo people to it (pilgrimages and offerings) either to make good sense or not, as the case may be, to individual Navajo people.

### Prophecy in Navajo Oral History

*We were told long ago that the gods would return when we began fighting amongst ourselves, stopped talking to one another and bad things were happening. . . . We've done this to ourselves. Most of us are too lazy to have cornfields. The only thing that has been happening is wind and dust blowing in our face every day.*  
—Sam Begay, quoted in Salt Lake Tribune, 17 May 1996

Navajo oral tradition relates their origin as successive emergences upward through a series of variously colored subterranean worlds. Columns of colored vaporous matter rose at each of the cardinal points in the First World; white in the east, blue in the south, yellow in the west, and black in the north. Where the white column and the black column met in the east, a male being was formed. Simultaneously, where the blue column and the yellow column met in the west, a female being was created (Goddard 1933: 127; O'Bryan 1956: 1; Yazzie 1971: 9). These beings are considered by many to be First Man and First Woman, the Holy People who direct all generative processes (O'Bryan 1956: 1; Yazzie 1971: 9). They soon moved on to the Second World. This and each subsequent world was in some state of chaos and disorder that resulted in the need for the Navajo ancestors to travel to the next world.

In the last underworld First Man, First Woman, and their progeny flourished until lust led to adultery, which in turn led to a conflict between First Man and First Woman. During the quarrel it was revealed that each felt the other sex was inferior and that each sex was capable of existing without the other. Men and women decided to live apart. During the separation, their sexual desires became ever stronger. To appease their sexual passions, the women masturbated with various objects—cactus, deer tendons, or rocks—while the men tried to relieve their longing with mud or the flesh of freshly slain game animals (Stephen 1930: 99; O'Bryan 1956: 8; Yazzie 1971: 30; Haile 1981: 25; Zolbrod 1984: 63). Eventually, realizing that without the other sex they could survive but never flourish, the men and women agreed to rejoin and live as one group.

Shortly after the reunion, Coyote stole a child from the female *Téé-hooltsódíí* (Water Monster), who in retaliation caused a great flood to

overtake the world. Hearing of the imminent flood, First Man directed that everyone should quickly gather their personal belongings and flee to an appointed mountain. As the people climbed higher and higher, the water continued to rise. Once gathered at the summit, they sequentially planted various species in hopes that one would grow far enough to allow the people to escape from the approaching floodwaters (Goddard 1933: 130–31; Fishler 1953: 4; O'Bryan 1956: 8–10).

First Man planted a cedar tree, hoping to have it reach the top of the sky so that everyone could climb to safety. The tree grew quickly, but it was too short. Next, he planted a pine tree. However, it was not tall enough to reach the top of the sky, either. The third effort by First Man to find a means of escaping the water was to plant a male reed, but it also failed to reach the top of the sky. The fourth attempt was to plant a female reed. It grew to the very top of the sky.

The people crowded into the great female reed and began to climb up. The water followed them as they climbed inside the giant reed. (Yazzie 1971: 15)

Their journey upward culminated with their emergence onto the earth's surface.

The male and female Water Monsters, who had followed the people up the great reed in an attempt to regain their child, stuck their heads out of the reed.

I don't know if they [the people] had their sacred stones with them. Then they got an abalone basket [white (?) shell used as a receptacle] and abalone shells [pieces] and put this on the female Water Monster's head between her horns. For the male Water Monster, they put white shell [turquoise] and a white shell basket in the same way. They used those because white shell and turquoise represents the male. . . . Then they pleaded with the Water Monster to let them take the baby with them, so that in the future the people may have plenty of rain, so that the rains may come all of the time. "We have made offerings in packets to you, this also will help provide us with plenty of rain." After that the monsters left. (Sylvia Manygoats, quoted in Kelley and Francis 1994 [36–37], bracketed commentary in the original)

As pointed out by Klara Kelley and Harris Francis, this ceremonial act established the precedent for Navajo people to accompany prayers for rain at mountain springs with offerings of *ntl'iz* ("hard goods"—precious stones and shells). The people "kept the baby, because taking the baby caused the Water Monster to bring rain, but made an offering as a fee



to the Water Monster to compel it to control the force of rainstorms” (Kelley and Francis 1994: 37). Once the Water Monsters were appeased, the people turned their attentions to establishing a life for themselves in this new location.

At the place of emergence, First Man and First Woman built a sweat lodge in which they thought and sang the world, as the Navajo know it, into existence (Witherspoon 1977: 16–17). To strengthen the earth and demarcate Navajo sacred geography, the Holy People put a mountain at each of the four cardinal points (Wyman 1970: 16). Next, they created plants and animals with which to populate the world and dressed each mountain with a particular precious stone or shell and various cosmic elements. Thus, each of the sacred mountains, colors, qualities, holy personages, clans, and *ntl’iz*, which make up the fundamental components of Navajo cosmology, became associated with a season of the year, a time of day, and a phase of life (see Figure 1 for placement of each in Navajo cosmology). The newly created world was in a state of “natural order” in which all living things were in their prescribed places and in their proper relationships with all other living things. But this orderliness was not to endure.

In time, the perfect order of the world was disrupted as a result of the sexual aberrations and excesses of the last underworld. The women who had masturbated with quills, cactus, antlers, stones, and bones gave birth to misshapen creatures that grew into huge monsters and preyed on the healthy children. As a result of the birth of these monsters, death and destruction loomed over the world.

To resolve this dilemma, the Diyin Dine’*é* arranged for *Asdzáq Nád-lehé* (Changing Woman) to be found on one of the central mountains of Navajo sacred geography—Governador Knob. A dark cloud appeared at the summit and when Haashch’*éélti’í* (Talking God), investigated, he found a baby girl lying under a rainbow and softly falling rain. Under the direction of the Holy People, First Man and First Woman raised her. Owing to this special care, she matured at an accelerated rate: in two days she walked, in four days she talked, and in twelve days she began to menstruate. Her menstruation was cause for great joy because it symbolized the restoration of power and fertility on the earth. Shortly after coming of age, Changing Woman mated with Sun and subsequently gave birth to twin boys, Monster Slayer and Born-for-Water. Upon reaching adolescence, the Twins went on a quest to find their father. With the aid of several Diyin Dine’*é*, they found his home, where Sun forced them to endure various trials in order to prove that they were indeed his children. Their survival convinced Sun of their parentage and he supplied them with weapons with which to slay the monsters. Together they saved the world by slaying all the monsters except Hunger, Poverty, Old Age, and Lice.



Figure 1. Navajo cosmology.

Lonely for companionship, “the White Bead Woman [who is most often considered to be one and the same as Changing Woman] wished now to have her own people. She wished to have a people that she could call her grandchildren. They would carry on the lore that she would teach them. They would respect and hold holy the prayers and chants that she would give them” (O’Bryan 1956: 166). To fulfill her need, Asdzáá Nádleehé created the members of the original four Navajo clans by combining epidermal tissue rubbed from her own body with ntl’iz and corn. These newly formed

beings were animated by either her breath or the entrance of Holy Winds (Franciscan Fathers 1910: 356; Goddard 1933: 168; McNeley 1981: 24–27; Wyman 1970: 447–48; Yazzie 1971: 74; Matthews 1994 [1897]: 147–48; Schwarz 1997a: 62–67). Hence, the Navajo consider themselves to be the *Nihookáá Dine'é* (Earth Surface People), created on the earth's surface by Changing Woman, the most highly revered of all Navajo Holy People and the inner form of the earth. After their creation, Changing Woman and the other Diyin Dine'é decided to turn the world over to the Nihookáá Dine'é, entrusting them with stewardship over *Diné'tah* “the geographical area demarcated by their sacred mountains that the Navajo consider to be their ancestral homeland” (O'Bryan 1956: 112).<sup>11</sup>

At this juncture, Asdzáá Nádleehé taught the Nihookáá Dine'é critical bodies of knowledge—songs, prayers, and ceremonies—with which to sustain themselves in their special form of life and to restore proper relations whenever disruptions occurred. She cautioned them that to maintain good fortune and avert catastrophe, prayers and offerings such as *ntl'iz* or *tádidíin* (pollen) must be made to the Holy People at specific sites within Navajo sacred geography. These ceremonial acts serve to bring rain and to protect home, family, livestock, and the land (Aberle 1993: 161, 169; Kelley and Francis 1994: 33–35). In combination, these various types of knowledge formed a charter between the Navajo people and the Holy People which guaranteed that if the Nihookáá Dine'é carefully followed the teachings of the Holy People the “natural order” of the Navajo world would be preserved and their special way of life would flourish.

Such knowledge did not come without a price. Asdzáá Nádleehé warned the Nihookáá Dine'é not to forget what she had taught them, for if they did grave consequences would result. “She began to sing and taught us the songs. . . . ‘Some of the songs I will not teach you. My grandchildren who live over there will teach you those. *Do not forget those I have taught you. The day you forget them will be the last, there will be no other days.*’ This is what our grandmother [Changing Woman] told us” (Goddard 1933: 175, emphasis added). Once this knowledge was transferred, the Diyin Dine'é departed to take their places as inner forms residing within each feature of Navajo sacred geography (Wyman 1965: 91). Now it was established that during times of crisis, prophetic insights and omens from the Holy People would be conveyed to the Earth Surface People in dreams (Reichard 1950: 550–51) or by means of various go-betweens such as coyotes, owls, or snakes. But, as they began to depart from the earth, Talking God and the other Holy People said: “‘If anyone sees us it will also be a sign that an enemy is coming into the country. If he hears us call, that same person will be killed by an enemy before the day is over.’ And so saying they all re-

turned to their homes and all their power went with them. They were never seen again. (Now if anyone thinks he sees one of the Holy Beings it will not be for the good of the people. It is considered a bad omen.)" (O'Bryan 1956: 111). This warning elucidates the profound significance afforded by many Navajo people to the Holy Visit of 1996.

### "This Is Not an Isolated Incident"

MS: *What is going on with this Holy Visit?*

HW: *I am kind of skeptical about it. It really does not fall within Navajo cultural tradition, because when the Holy People left, they said they would not be seen again. They said, "If anyone says that they see us, it will not be a good thing."*

MS: *Well Harry, people seem to be indicating that it is not a good thing, that it is an omen that something terrible will happen.*

HW: *Not a good thing, meaning it will not be true. I have seen several such incidents on the reservation during my lifetime, but this one has caught the fancy of the media.*

— Walters 1996

MS: *Have you ever heard of incidents like this in the past?*

AW: *Yeah, but it was really never publicized, you know, it would just be like in that community.*

MS: *Right.*

AW: *And they would like keep it to themselves. Maybe like two major ones through my whole lifetime. And this is the third one, but this was pretty well like heard all over the reservation, outside the reservation and stuff like that.*

MS: *Oh, absolutely.*

AW: *But like before, . . . it was really like kept in the community or just the relatives and stuff and they did things for them. . . . I guess like, you know, our parents heard about it and they were aware of it because my mom tells us of one that she had heard, you know, when she was in her teens [placing it in the 1940s or early 1950s] and then she said that, you know like I said, they weren't publicized or anything. They [those visited] just were directed to do something like a Blessing Way or do their offerings and stuff. And that is what happened [how such visitations were dealt with], I guess, at that time.*

— Anonymous woman 1996

At the time of European contact, the Navajo were located in their ancestral homeland with a subsistence system based on hunting and gathering supplemented by some agriculture (see Brugge 1983: 489–501). Navajo population and their area of settlement gradually expanded as new crops, animals, and technological innovations were added to their subsistence base during the Spanish and American periods. Like native people throughout

the Americas, Navajo endured many hardships at the hands of European and Euro-American conquerors. For example, in the nineteenth century an extended period of war resulted in nearly nine thousand Navajo being rounded up and forced to walk three hundred miles to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where they were incarcerated by the U.S. military from 1863 to 1868. On 1 June 1868, a treaty was signed which established a reservation on a portion of the Navajo homeland to which the captives were allowed to return. Although the Navajo economy and population gradually recovered during subsequent decades, the early years of the twentieth century were riddled with cultural and economic hardships caused by sustained droughts (Frisbie 1992: 446), loss of livestock due to poor forage and a series of severe winters (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 210), fluctuations in livestock and wool prices, and an estimated 10 to 15 percent reservation-wide mortality rate sustained during the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918–19 (Russell 1985: 381). These were also decades of intense prophetic activity.

Early in the summer of 1920, amid these multidimensional stresses, a ceremonial practitioner from the northeastern region of the Navajo reservation had a prophetic vision in which a great flood was predicted.<sup>12</sup>

A strange scare seized these Indians a few days ago. In some way the whole tribe got the idea that there was to be a flood which would cover the lowlands and drown nearly all the white people, and that the Navajos were to go to the mountains and be saved. When the flood was over if there were any white people left the Navajos could kill them easily and thus be rid of the white man and his ways forever. The flood was to be caused by the “ocean running over,” and some of the medicine men and prophets have been able/by faith/to see the waters coming. (Superintendent at Shiprock Agency, quoted in Bailey and Bailey 1982: 207)

This prophetic message purportedly came to the visionary during a four-day period of unconsciousness resulting from his having been struck by lightning.<sup>13</sup> He prophesied that on Saturday, 3 July 1920, two suns would rise at dawn and shortly thereafter a flood would rage through the Navajo homeland destroying everything in its path except those Navajo who had sought refuge on higher ground.

At the request of the visionary, runners carried his message to Navajo people across a wide area (Brugge 1980: 313–14). Word of the imminent event reached as far east as Chaco Canyon in New Mexico (Hewett 1936: 139), as far west as Winslow, Arizona (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 208), and as far south as Ramah, New Mexico (Kluckhohn 1942: 59). Some Navajo remained skeptical of the account but, as the superintendent at Shiprock

Agency reported (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 207): "To the vast majority of the Indians the scare is real and nothing short of an army could stop them from their march to the mountains with their flocks. They have already sustained heavy losses of young lambs, and have left fields and gardens to be ravaged by horses and other stock left behind. . . . A few of our Indians have not been stampeded, but they are very few." Fleeing to high ground made perfect sense to Navajo people hearing of the imminent flood because a worldwide flood followed by a mass exodus to another world was an effective problem-solving technique established in Navajo oral tradition (Goddard 1933: 130-31; Fishler 1953: 4; O'Bryan 1956: 8-10; Yazzie 1971: 15).

Most sought refuge in the higher elevations of the Santa Fe National Forest (Brugge 1980: 314), the Carrizo, the Lukachukai, the Black (Aberle 1982 [1966]: 347), the Chuska, or the Jemez Mountains (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 208), depending on the locations of family homesites. Noted Edgar Hewett (1936: 139):

Only sixteen years ago we witnessed a pell-mell exodus, not permanent, however, of Navaho. Warned by an old medicine man, that on the third of July, 1920, a great deluge would destroy all the white people and all Indians who remained on the desert, they packed up, bag and baggage, and broke for the western mountains. Horses and sheep were driven headlong, many cattle were left behind, crops abandoned at considerable loss. As the great catastrophe did not come off according to schedule we witnessed them drifting back, rather sheepishly, for some weeks.

Reports in regional newspapers highlighted the purported nativistic aspects of the prophecy by claiming that those fleeing deliberately attempted to conceal what was happening from local non-Natives (Brugge 1980: 313-14; Bailey and Bailey 1982: 209). Coupled with unexplained movements of large numbers of Navajo toward high ground, such reports caused fear of a Navajo uprising among non-Native people in the region (Brugge 1980: 313-14).

To date, few details have been documented about the actual events that transpired among members of the various Navajo groups while they awaited the flood on high ground. The single published account notes only that when the flood did not manifest itself on the predicted date the ceremonial practitioners coping with this dilemma determined that those gathered could avert the imminent disaster altogether through "collective prayer" (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 209). No new ceremony is known to have been generated by this vision, but those who credited the visionary with

efficacy reportedly carried out traditional ceremonies such as *Hózhóqíí* (Blessing Way) with unusual frequency (Kluckhohn 1942: 59).

An elder from the northeastern quadrant of the reservation, with whom I consulted on these matters, readily volunteered the story of how local people coped with the flood prophecy in 1920 and offered details about the specific actions taken by Navajo individuals to avert catastrophe.

MS: I have been doing some research on this and I found several references to visitations and other relevant events that occurred earlier in this century. Like in 1920 there was a prophecy that there would be a flood. Did you ever hear anything about that?

AE: Yes that, I heard about it and then they put some, in these where the springs are? They put some ah, the special stones, you know, *ntl'iz*? The precious stones?

MS: Right.

AE: And I guess they told their Holy People that they would not want to see the water and so a lot of people said, "Nobody knew what they were doing and that is the reason why we don't have no rain anymore!" But, they said, "There is no one that knows how to get the water back. . . ."

MS: Well I heard that there were a lot of Navajo people at the time who sought high ground—that they left their homes and went to high ground. Did you know about anyone that did that?

AE: My, my mother did but my father didn't because one of his uncles said, "No," it would not happen. [He said] that, "We won't see a flood." And he said, "These poor people are moving up to the mountains for nothing!" you know? . . . But my mom did go up there, to her herd up there, but my dad stayed behind because he was tending to his, ahh, they were cutting alfalfa around that time. And so I guess my dad never left the place here, but my mom did take the sheep up to the mountain. . . . And my husband heard about it and he moved up to the mountain with his mother.

MS: Well did you ever hear what was done while they were up on the mountain? What kinds of ceremonies were done up there?

AE: It is just that there were a lot of people that did the offerings of precious stones to, for the sacred mountain sites, you know, where they usually do those? The offering places?

MS: Uh-huh, so they went to the sacred sites on the mountains that they were seeking refuge on?

AE: Uh-huh. (Anonymous elder #2 1996)<sup>14</sup>

Droughts continued to plague the area in 1930, 1933, and 1935 (Frisbie 1992: 466). These unfavorable weather conditions, coupled with govern-

mental beliefs about endangerment to Navajo rangeland from overgrazing, led to federally mandated stock-reduction programs that greatly diminished family herds. As a consequence, dependence on wage labor on and off the reservation increased, as did acceptance of non-Navajo religious beliefs and practices such as Catholicism, Protestantism, Mormonism, and the Native American Church (Aberle 1982 [1966]; Frisbie 1992). These multiple sources of social and economic strain also resulted in internally generated ceremonial innovations.

In 1936 a young woman from near Huerfano Mesa—one of the central mountains of Navajo sacred geography closely associated with Changing Woman—was visited by White Shell Woman (Kluckhohn 1942: 59; Brugge 1980: 445; Bailey and Bailey 1982: 473).<sup>15</sup> White Shell Woman directed her in the performance of special Hózhǫ́ǫ́jí ceremonies, which were distinguished by specific additional procedures. Once learned, these rites were widely carried out in the northeastern portion of the Navajo area (Kluckhohn 1942: 59–60).

In late 1936 or early 1937, a woman in the Farmington, New Mexico, region was visited by *Hadahoniye'* 'Ashkii (Banded Rock or Mirage Stone Boy), a holy person associated with mineral deposits in the area (Watson 1937: 16; Kluckhohn 1942: 60; Brugge 1980: 446; Bailey and Bailey 1982: 473).<sup>16</sup> One morning, *Hadahoniye'* 'Ashkii quietly entered the woman's *hooghan* (traditional Navajo home) as she sat with her back to the door preoccupied with a household task. After a moment of silence, "someone tapped her on top of the head."

Turning around she beheld a little man. He was not over three feet tall and was very, very old. All of his clothing was of a rich, wine color. The woman saw that the skin of his chest, where his jacket hung open, was vari-colored; banded like rocks that she had seen near her home.

After watching her for a moment the little man began to talk. "You listen to what I am going to say," he admonished her. "Things are not good in the country. Times are bad; the people are bad. The rain does not come and the sheep do not increase. We do not live the right way anymore. The whole world is the same. People have forgotten the right way to live and everyone thinks the wrong thoughts. It is not good. The people should hold ceremonies. They must pray for things to be good again." (Watson 1937: 16)

Before departing, *Hadahoniye'* 'Ashkii gave her specific instructions regarding requisite ceremonial rites (*ibid.*). He told her that in order for rain to come, Hózhǫ́ǫ́jí needed to be held, wherein the one sung over must be a woman of the *Tódich'íi'nii* (Bitter Water clan). Navajo seeking blessings for their families must make offerings of *ntł'iz* (*ibid.*: 17). These special



Hózhǫ́ǫ́jí were meant to benefit the entire world, not just the Navajo who participated in them (*ibid.*; Brugge 1980: 446).

The first such ceremony was held at the home of the visionary who was a member of the requisite clan—Tódich'íi'nii. Others were held “near the Hogback,” at locations east and north of Shiprock, New Mexico, at Red Rock, New Mexico, and elsewhere (Watson 1937: 16–17).<sup>17</sup> After these numerous ceremonies, Hadahoniye' 'Ashkii reappeared to the woman in a dream (*ibid.*: 17–18). He commended the Navajo for performing the proper ceremonies and, as a gift, left a “double handful” of corn that subsequently multiplied tenfold (*ibid.*: 18). Upon request, the visionary distributed four kernels of this special corn per person, and directed recipients to use it as seed to grow corn for their ceremonial needs (*ibid.*). In contrast to the antiwhite sentiment associated with the flood prophecy of 1920, this visitor predicted that good would eventually come to Navajo people from the various programs instituted by the federal government (*ibid.*).

The experiences of numerous other visionaries have been reported since Hadahoniye' 'Ashkii's visit. A Navajo named Mose Blackgoat tried to popularize an innovative ceremonial that was purportedly taught to him in a dream while he slept in a cave, but his untimely death ended his crusade (Haile 1940: 359). Sometime between 1936 and 1941, a woman from the Shiprock area was visited by a person she believed to be Jesus Christ while she was out herding (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 473). The visitor reportedly told her, “I will lead you out of these terrible troubles that the whites are making for you” (Solon T. Kimball, quoted in Aberle 1982 [1966]: 74).<sup>18</sup> Sometime in the 1940s, Jesus Christ reportedly visited a Navajo family in the central portion of the reservation near Wheatfields Lake. I was told,

AE: There was one that I heard about over in Wheatfields [Arizona], this guy, . . . I guess when he was younger, and he was riding home on his horse, and he saw someone in white, you know?

MS: Uh-huh.

AE: And it followed him all the way home. And then it stayed. They invited him [to stay with them], but [the person to whom the visitor appeared] said, “This, whoever it was wasn't talking at all.” And so in the morning, after they prepared the food and whoever it was, they said this, he [the person visited] is my uncle too, and he said he thinks it was Jesus, you know?

MS: Uh-huh.

AE: It was all in white. And then so, he said when they were preparing a meal, and he [the visitor] went out and they never saw him again or never did see the footprint [referring to those left at Rocky Ridge] or nothing.

MS: Uh-huh, did he give any kind of a message?

AE: He didn't. He didn't say anything at all to them! But ahh, you know, they were kind of disturbed.

MS: Well sure.

AE: But they said, "Well it must be something. . . . It must be a good, a good fortune or something." So, and then another lady from there saw the same person the next day around noon, but they said it never stayed around, it just went on again. Those are the two things that I heard from C.C. from Wheatfields. And he said this happened a long time ago, when he was just a boy, he was about, maybe around fourteen. (Anonymous elder #2 1996)

In 1941, in the Largo or Blanco Canyon area, a woman saw a vision of a field filled with the skulls of white men. She reported that the Japanese were actually Changing Woman's warrior sons, Born-for-Water and Monster Slayer, "who were coming to kill the white men" (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 473; see also Aberle 1982 [1966]: 74).<sup>19</sup>

A woman with whom I am acquainted from the southwestern quadrant of the reservation told me of several visitations during her lifetime.

MS: When have you heard about visitations like this in the past? Do you remember, like how old you were or anything?

AW: It was just something that you heard, like they came to the home and you know it could, like this one time a lady dressed up, was in a *biil* [hand-woven two-piece dress] and all that, and the *kénitsaai* [moccasins with deerskin leggings] and you know like that?

MS: Uh-huh [acknowledging that I understand that the women was wearing traditional attire].

AW: They said that she came to this one place and she warned them of something that was going to happen! But never anything as such with the like, um, footprints and all of that [referring to the incident at Rocky Ridge]. . . .

MS: Was the lady that came in the *biil* a god?

AW: That is what, according to that person, yeah.

MS: Uh-huh. Did they know which one it was, or who she was?

AW: No, um, well this particular one that happened this past spring, she [Sarah Begay] identified who she thought these gods were. The previous ones, you know, they just said you know, it was a person dressed up like this, but they know like they weren't human beings because, well I mean, they knew that they were gods because of the way they moved and the way, the things that they had to say. (Anonymous woman 1996)

It is not uncommon for the exact identities of holy visitors to remain ambiguous. For example, a visit by an unidentified holy person was reported in the Checkerboard district in 1992 or 1993. In this case, the message conveyed was simply “to pray more” (Jones 1996).<sup>20</sup> But other factors, such as the time of year when individual visitations or prophecies occur, offer important clues.

Although the times of year in which these various Holy People visited Navajo at points throughout this century are not always known, it is known that the flood prophecy occurred just prior to July of 1920 and Hadahoniye’ ’Ashkii visited the woman on the cusp of winter and spring. Like the Holy Visit at Rocky Ridge, these incidents each occurred during the window of opportunity for materials—pollen, ntl’iz, cornmeal—to be offered at sacred sites, for seasonal restrictions delimit when offerings can and cannot be made.

AE: And then, in the wintertime that is the only time that you don’t do offerings.

MS: You don’t?

AE: Because of the frozen ground.

MS: Ohh! So that is one of the activities that you can’t do in the winter?

AE: Yes, uh-huh, only in the summertime. And then, after the hibernation of the “Mountain People” [bears, chipmunks, squirrels] and the “Ground People,” too. I mean snakes and all these others. . . .

You know, you are not supposed to do offerings when the ground is frozen. (Anonymous elder #2 1996)

Furthermore, the season during which a visitation occurs directly associates it with various components of Navajo cosmology (see Figure 1). The timing of visitations, therefore, connects them with particular phases of the Navajo cycle of life. At the close of the annual cycle, the world is cleansed by winter. At the start of the next annual cycle, the world is new. A springtime visit such as that at Rocky Ridge, therefore, is associated with cleansing and new beginnings. This is the appropriate time to plant, to begin construction on a new dwelling, to affirm new relationships through marriage, and for new life to begin. Thus, the message brought by the Holy People to Rocky Ridge is inherently imbued with hope for cultural and cosmic renewal.

## Reactions to the Holy Visit at Rocky Ridge

*About two weeks ago, two humanoid figures appeared briefly before 61-year-old Sarah Begay of Big Mountain and imparted a message of warning to the Navajo people. Since then, hordes of people have flocked to the area to pray, see and hear Sarah's story for themselves.* —Hopi Tutuveni, 24 May 1996

*News of Navajo deities' visit draws thousands to site.* —Arizona Republic, 28 May 1996

*The drought has brought a religious resurgence. . . . Navajos are holding family ceremonies all across the reservation and many politicians have since embraced prayer as a way to fight the drought.* —High Country News, 5 August 1996

Immediately following the Holy Visit at Rocky Ridge, Alfred Yazzie of Fort Defiance, Arizona, was called upon to perform a Hózhóǵǵí for the benefit of Sarah Begay, her mother Irene Yazzie, and other members of their family (*High Country News*, 5 August 1996).<sup>21</sup>

She told us of this event at her home when we visited. "A Blessing Way was conducted for me," she added. "A relative conducted the ceremony over me. I was washed at the place where the beings stood and an all-night sing was done."

Many medicine men and elders had come to visit her. As instructed by others, she made four loaves of kneel-down bread. The loaves of kneel-down bread were made as an offering to the medicine man to conduct the Blessing Way. The medicine man himself requested the four loaves of kneel-down bread as a payment to him, too. Nothing was to be offered. No fabric or material cloths were to be placed on the ground where the medicine man's "tools" generally are placed. The medicine man only offered a sprinkle of corn pollen in place of it, and then he placed his tools on top. The loaves of kneel-down bread, offered to the medicine man as payment, were eaten by the attendees on the final night of the Blessing Way. The water used to soften the kneel-down bread was even consumed at the Blessing Way, too. . . . That was all explained to us, while we were there. (Anonymous elder #1 1996)

Ceremonial practitioners also came to the site to perform the "Four Pebble ceremony, which is done when there are no rains" (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996). In addition, President Hale visited the site on horseback. On 16 May 1996 he issued a memorandum urging all five thousand tribal government employees to visit the site, where they could make prayers and

offerings. To facilitate these pilgrimages, Hale granted each employee a four-hour leave to make the journey (*Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 May 1996).

In response to news of the incident and Hale's memorandum, familial groups began visiting the site of the Holy Visit. A woman with whom I am acquainted who made the pilgrimage with family members shortly after the incident occurred gave the following account of her visit:

aw: We went. . . . And we witnessed very little, very little evidence, I mean, you know they said, "That is where they stood," and you could just see like the ah, the footprints. It is not really a footprint it is like when you go into the ground, ground level with like [a pair of] socks on. It was hardly visible because it was just so windy. And not too many people had shown up at that time yet. But there was like maybe twenty people ahead of us when we were in line to do our, we did our offerings over there.

ms: OK, so what type of offerings do you make to a site like that?

aw: Well, we used our corn pollen. And then we used some of the white, ground white corn. That is what my mom wanted us to do, to use. That is what we did and we just prayed. And that is when John's mom was pretty bad and he prayed for her too. . . . But, like two weeks after it happened, I understand that the line was like almost a mile long. People were waiting to do their offerings and stuff. But when we got there, you know, we didn't have to wait too long. And we spoke to the lady that, you know, actually witnessed what happened?

ms: Sarah Begay?

aw: Uh-huh. And she um, she told us very little. She said she's been, you know, been telling people over and over what has taken place. There were people bringing food and money, and they were doing that as a donation. And she had already had a Blessing Way done. And that day, she was telling us, you know, she was going to wash up that Sunday [meaning Sunday would be the fourth day after the Blessing Way]. . . . And so she said, she just had a Blessing Way done and she was just waiting to wash up and um, she kind of like told us in a group, you know, she didn't tell us one-by-one. But, you know, we had like, a little bit, a little conversation with her because by clan she is our sister, on our dad's side. I guess our dad was her brother. . . . This thing kind of got into the public [arena] and then they wanted to take cameras out and stuff. And there was a lot of controversy about that and then people were saying, you know it has been heard, like you said through up there [Seattle, Washington] and even to Phoenix and different areas. And I guess they wanted tourists to come through

and people wanted to, I guess there was a lot of controversy and then they kind of just banned everybody out except for the Navajo. (Anonymous woman 1996)

Indeed, a sign posted at the end of the road leading to the Begay home stated that the site was closed to all non-Navajo.<sup>22</sup> Additional signs were posted around the Begay home that listed specific rules for proper behavior and etiquette (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 25 May 1996). At the request of the family, cameras and video recorders were not allowed at the site (*Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 May 1996; *Arizona Republic*, 28 May 1996).

Testimonials from visitors to the site clearly document rules delimiting the visits that are typical of "nativistic" movements. For example, one pilgrim to the site claims that visitors in nontraditional attire were denied access.

Next my wife's auntie takes her family to the place of the "Visit". Again there is a very large line to make offerings and prayers. My wife's auntie is dressed in traditional attire and is allowed to make her offerings and prayers. Its [*sic*] her daughter [*sic*] turn to make a offering, and [she] is turned back, she is told that no one will be allowed [who is] not dressed in traditional attire to make offerings and prayers. The daughter returns to the van[,] dresses in traditional skirt and blouse[,] and is allowed back in line to pray and make offerings. (Jones 1996)

These exclusionary practices stemmed from the fact that, although initial reports of the message brought by the holy visitors focused specifically on the drought being caused by a lack of offerings to the Holy People, in subsequent tellings focus shifted more generally to the loss of traditions on the part of Navajo people.

MS: What did the holy visitors say? What was the message?

AE: Well the people down there [at Rocky Ridge] were saying that it was just pertaining to water? You know, "You're not doing the offerings to us," and [the Holy People who visited] said, "You are supposed to do a lot of offerings to us so that you can have a rain, rain back and all," that is what the question was that they, I guess they brought.

MS: So it was having to do with the drought?

AE: Yes, it was with the drought that's, that's the only thing it was. That is what they came for, they said.

MS: Huh? Well, because I have heard other people say that it is because Navajo people have lost their traditions.

AE: Well that, a little bit of that too. But, like I said, at first, I guess, it was just pertaining to water, and then later on, the next day it was added that, "We don't dress properly, like we are supposed to dress," or "We cut our hair. We are supposed to wear buns," and all of this came up later on. (Anonymous elder #2 1996)

Speculative claims and exclusionary admonishments seem to have gone both ways in this case, for word spread among traditional people on the reservation to avoid the site because the Begay/Yazzie family members were suspected of being members of the Native American Church. One elder told me,

AE: Well, I heard about it some and my uncle said that, "These people they are eating peyote!"

MS: Really?

AE: . . . So he said, "Don't go over there!" Because, you know, I don't belong to that! And my uncle doesn't belong to that either! And we are just old, old tradition. That is what we are holding. When I go places, you know, I know the signs that they have in their homes. That is how I can tell. And so, they usually have some kind of ahh, you know, something that is on the wall or something? And then from there we know that they're, they belong to those [the Native American Church] and then so my uncle had warned me when I was learning he said, "Don't mix it! They don't mix!" (Anonymous elder #2 1996)

This accusation is particularly interesting in light of the fact that, when a Navajo man reportedly approached the site carrying a "peyote box and gourd" (Native American Church paraphernalia) he was stopped and told that the "tool box and gourd" would not be allowed. Although displeased by this intervention, when he returned to the site without them he was allowed to make his offerings and prayers (Jones 1996).

As the weeks passed, the number of visitors to the site steadily increased until "at any one time, there were over a hundred people lined up to pray and give offerings of turquoise and white shell at the footprint site" (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996). For some, especially those traveling with young children, the wait was just too much.

My sister-in-law, Joe's wife, went out there and wanted to do the offerings, and they said, you know they were in line for like four hours and they got hungry and the kids got restless and, I mean, they said the line was not moving fast enough so they just left. That is how bad it was. It was so publicized that people all over the reservation came

around and then too like I think toward the end where there were too many people, they had to have some police escorts. You know, to kind of like keep people in line and, you know, from all that, and warn them to bring their own food or whatever. (Anonymous woman 1996)

In addition to the line of people waiting their turns to make offerings, a second long line extended to the doorway of the family hooghan to hear Mrs. Begay tell the story. "Inside with her were several medicine men and a couple of people taking notes, and the audience who sat on the floor to hear the story. In front of Sara [Begay] was a foot high stack of dollar bills and a basket with tokens, fetishes and medicine bundles" (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996). Some of those who were patient enough to endure the long waits, like the woman from near Crownpoint, New Mexico, whose account of her visit to Rocky Ridge follows, were rewarded by hearing the story of the visit directly from Mrs. Begay.

The event of the Holy Visit was explained to us by the woman who encountered the incident. . . . She said, "It took place fourteen days ago." . . . "I was the only one home with my mother. My mother is old," she said. "She is very old." In the morning, the older lady said "Two people will be coming to visit us." "'Who is coming to us, mother?,' I repeated to her," was the response of the daughter. "I asked again, 'Who is visiting us?' to my mother," stated the daughter. "How far are they now?" the older woman would ask. "They are coming," she adds.

The daughter was making a dress for her mother for Mother's Day. While she was sewing, she heard something outside the house where they lived. The sound seemed to have come through the window. The daughter mentioned to us that she readily dismissed the noise. Shortly after the first strange noise, a second one sounded. The noise was of "blowing through a ceremonial bone whistle [*ts'its'óós*]." The daughter got up and mentioned to her mother, "Someone has come to us with a bone whistle." When the daughter heard the noise again, she rushed to the door to find out what or who was making the bone whistling sound.

With the door open, fabric still in hand, the daughter looked outside to see what was going on. Nothing out of the ordinary was happening. While she was still scanning the horizon attempting to find out where the noise was coming from, the bone whistle sounded again. From the frame house where they resided, a small oak tree is standing in the front of the house. The oak tree is located on the north



side of the house. The sounds seemed to have come from the top of the oak tree, in that general area. The daughter looked around and there was nothing around. When she looked back toward the north, after looking to the south, the beings were standing there. There were two beings, standing side by side. One being was white and the other was blue. "Their hair was white. They both had pure white hair. Really white. Their hair was white and shining-like, sort of reflective," she stated. The lady was unable to see their faces, because a fog-like cloud seemed to have drifted in front of their faces.

They were standing and facing her as she stood in the front of her house. One spoke, stating, "We are here to bring a message." "We are here visiting to bring a message," they repeated. "We are missing the offerings and the corn pollen," they said. "We are here for them," one stated. The lady did not say any words to the two beings. . . . The two beings stated, "We will be visiting other places, too. We are here to bring a message." I do not know where else they will be visiting.<sup>23</sup> . . . "Hurry in making your offerings and placing of corn pollen," the two beings told the lady . . . as stated by the lady who spoke to us. Those were the words they brought to us. I guess somewhere people have done that. Offerings have been made in some areas. "Navajo are not living the right way now," they added. Those were the words the lady heard from the visitors.

She tried to move, wanting to walk, but could not move. She wanted to look to the side, but her neck could not move. The only movement she was able to do was moving backward. She was only able to move in that direction, so she stepped back. Taking a couple of steps back, she was able to reach the front door of her house. She opened the door and rushed back inside. "Mother something came to visit us!" the lady stated to her mother. The lady ran to her mother and embraced her. The old lady ran her hands on her daughter's body. The old lady was blind. . . . She was hard of hearing, too. The old lady was running her hands on the body of her daughter, moving her hands from top to bottom in a motion which seemed like she was brushing away something or attempting to find something. The daughter added, "It helped me calm down." After she calmed down, she went back to the front door. She poked her head outside; there was nothing out there. No one was outside. Apparently the visitors had left. . . . That is all I know and heard, that was how it was explained to me when we went to the site of the Holy Visit. I did not add a word nor did I delete a word. I have repeated the words I heard. (Anonymous elder #1 1996)

Others were disappointed when they were only able to hear “what the medicine men had to say about it” (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996), for the *hataalii* (singers or medicine men and women) surrounding Sarah Begay took over the telling of the incident when she succumbed to exhaustion and her voice failed. As Irene Atcitty of Shiprock, New Mexico, explained, “We were told that Sarah [Begay] has told the story of the visits so many times that she lost her voice” (cited in *Arizona Republic*, 28 May 1996). Despite these disappointments, pilgrims continued to arrive at the Begay/Yazzie home.

By the third week of May, the number of people making pilgrimages to the site resulted in visitors having to park more than a mile from the site and numerous hardships for the Begay/Yazzie family members. Water for livestock and household use became scarce and it was difficult to find the funds to continue to host visitors (*Navajo Times*, 23 May 1996). Owing to these circumstances, Kelsey Begaye, Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council, recommended that “out of courtesy and respect [for the Begay/Yazzie family] we should slow down on the visitation[s] to the site” (*Navajo Times*, 23 May 1996). It is hard to imagine exactly how many Navajo might have visited the location where the Holy Visit took place during the summer of 1996 if Speaker Begaye had not made this plea, but by the middle of July over twenty thousand people had made the pilgrimage (G. Joe 1996).<sup>24</sup> In addition to these pilgrimages and the offerings, Navajo families across the reservation held ceremonies and many politicians embraced prayer as a means of counteracting the drought.

In fact, Speaker Begaye called for an official day of prayer to unite Navajo people of all faiths. The twentieth of June 1996 was declared the first official Navajo Nation Unity Day of Prayer with the intention that it would become an annual event, and tribal employees were given the afternoon off to participate in their own ways.<sup>25</sup> The day of prayer was declared “in the hopes that Navajos would spend part of the day in traditional prayer for solutions to various problems affecting the Navajo Nation” (*Navajo Times*, 20 June 1996).

Navajo of all faiths joined together at the Navajo Nation Civic Center in Window Rock, Arizona, to participate in this spiritual event that included elements of the traditional Navajo religion, the Native American Church, and the various Christian faiths.<sup>26</sup> Several hundred Navajo people crowded into the civic center bleachers. Thousands of other Navajo living in remote areas of the reservation who could not make the trip to Window Rock participated by listening to or watching live radio or television broadcasts of the event (*Navajo Times*, 27 June 1996; *High Country News*, 5 August 1996).<sup>27</sup> As reported in the *Navajo Times*, 27 June 1996, “some

people could be seen pulling their cars off the road to pray in the afternoon. . . Families were seen stepping out of their doorways to offer corn pollen. Early in the morning, some people offered gemstones and prayed. A group also went to Blanca Peak, the sacred mountain in the east. Christian churches in Window Rock and Tuba City gathered to listen to the prayer day event and followed with their own ceremonies."

Many Navajo felt that their prayers were answered as the first substantial rain in nearly nine months fell on Navajo country the very next day. Although they were not enough to break the drought, the sporadic rain showers which came in the days and weeks following the Navajo Nation Unity Day of Prayer were seen as a "sign of hope" (*High Country News*, 5 August 1996). Yet, in his account of the event, Speaker Begaye emphasized social and cultural changes that have resulted in the loss of Navajo language and traditions over concerns about the Navajo-Hopi land dispute or the drought.

We all live in a time of great challenges. We live in a time of uncertainty and there are constant changes taking place among us. The majority of our children are not speaking their Navajo language; they are not being taught their cultural and traditional values; the foundation of family values are [*sic*] not being emphasized to them; and we are straying away from our spiritual strengths and values. We must begin our journey back to being a strong Nation, we must start now. . . . In light of these conditions among our people, we had reports of a visitation from our Deities at Rocky Ridge. A special message was delivered to us. . . . I was asked by the Navajo people to organize a day of prayer where we could pause and unite in prayer. . . . Prayers were offered for the Navajo Nation by a traditional Navajo Medicineman, a Native American Church Roadman, and [a] Christian Pastor. . . . I believe that by the prayers that were offered by different religious means, we showed the United States that the Navajo people are the Diné, and no matter what differences we may have, we are tied by being Navajo first, and secondly by our unique clans system. (Begaye, quoted in *Navajo Times*, 25 July 1996)

Many Navajo felt unified as they actively participated in these various events, but not everyone who learned of the Holy Visit participated or even lent credence to it. In the months following the incident at Rocky Ridge, resistance to it took many different forms.

## Resistance

*Sarah Begay is known to Hopi Tribal officials as a relocation resister, and the Hopi Tribal government is not taking this claim lightly, because it has been the practice of resisters [sic] to use what they can to remain on Hopi lands.* —Hopi Tutuveni, 24 May 1996

*Then again there is the other side that has been like saying . . . "If it was really the Holy People, you know, then we would have had rain for the summer!" And, you know, stuff like that.* —Anonymous woman 1996

*Hopis joked it was no more than a UFO sighting or possibly yet another ploy on the part of Navajos resisting relocation to reclaim the land awarded to Hopis by Congress some 17 years ago.* —High Country News, 5 August 1996

AE: My uncle said, "If that holy person or the two Holy People had really come," he said, "She [Sarah Begay] wouldn't be talking!"

MS: What now?

AE: He said that, "There is no way," he said, "The end of the world would have been already past!" . . .

MS: So are you saying that he told you that if the visitors were real Holy People, then the person to whom they came wouldn't have had time to tell the story because the world would have come to an end?

AE: Yeah, uh-huh!

—Anonymous elder #2 1996

Resistance to the accounts of prophets and the events resulting from them are commonplace. In the case of the Holy Visit of 1996, it came in the forms of counternarratives about the visit or the messages brought by the Holy People and claims that certain practices are counter to the teachings of the Holy People. Some non-Navajo resisted lending credence to Navajo spirituality by putting the events of 1996 into a familiar and therefore easily understood context—UFOs or Euro-American notions of "magic."<sup>28</sup> Navajo resistance to the events which occurred after the visitation focuses narrowly on the appropriateness of specific practices. Most closely scrutinized are the location of offerings, potential financial benefits for the Begay/Yazzie family, and the altering nature of Mrs. Begay's account. Considering the location of the visitation, it is not surprising that many of the counternarratives regarding this incident are attributable to Hopi people.

Although initial Navajo accounts of the events that transpired at Rocky Ridge did not directly connect them to the Navajo-Hopi land dispute, the very location of the visit made this ongoing conflict a subtext. Some Hopi accounts implied that the location of the visit was of special

significance (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996) and that reports of the incident were simply a publicity stunt contrived by Navajo resisting relocation off Hopi Partitioned Land to draw attention to their cause (*High Country News*, 5 August 1996).

Leigh Jenkins, director of the Office of Cultural Preservation of the Hopi Tribe reportedly said, "No one can blame the Hopis for being skeptical about this occurrence, because everything under the sun has been used (by the relocation resisters) to hold onto the land" (quoted in *Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996, parenthetical comment in original). Jenkins went on to add that "Hopis have always tried to be respectful of religion and might not doubt the authenticity of this occurrence if it were not for the fact that Navajos in the Big Mountain area are making the claim" (ibid.).

In February of 1997, at a special session of the Navajo Nation Council focused on the plight of Navajo residents of Hopi Partitioned Land, Mrs. Begay testified that a direct connection existed between the visitation and the then continuing struggle of several hundred Navajo families to remain on Hopi Partitioned Land:

I have seen the Holy People and they have said, "You were put on this land and this is your land." They stood there and they touched me and they talked to me.

The accommodation agreement does not means [*sic*] anything to me. This is Dine' [*sic*] peoples [*sic*] land. There were human beings here before us, they carved on the rocks some of our ceremonies. They created the arrowheads for us and some of our sandpaintings. For these reasons, we, Dine' people, are here at the present time. This is our land.

We were reminded of these things by the Holy People. For the ceremonial reasons, I am not negotiating. My prayers and my songs are connected with the mountains and the rainbows and the environment around here. Also, many Dine' people came and offered and prayed and sang to the Holy People at my home site. The Holy People are still here with these blessings.

I will not allow these prayers and these blessings, my religion, to be tampered with or bought by the Hopis. Into the future, I am going to keep this place holy for all Dine' people and make sure that the prayers and blessings continue on here. . . . I will not let the Hopis have control of this Holy Place. They do not know how to keep it holy. The Hopi people have their own gods. I do not know the way that they pray and offer and sing to these gods. I could not keep their sites holy, the same that they cannot keep this one holy. (Quoted in *Navajo Times*, 6 February 1997)

The implication of Mrs. Begay's statement is that the Holy People are not receiving prayers and offerings at the sacred sites in Navajo customary-use areas on Hopi Partitioned Land because the Navajo families who were given stewardship over these areas have been relocated off the land. Navajo are seen to have been negligent in the making of these offerings elsewhere due to a general loss of cultural knowledge (*Hopi Tutuveni*, 24 May 1996). Lack of cultural knowledge may have also led to what many Navajo deemed to be aberrant practices that occurred in response to the Holy Visit at Rocky Ridge.

Pilgrimages to and offerings at the site of a visitation are not established practices in the Navajo world. There is no evidence that any of the numerous visitations which occurred earlier in this century resulted in mass pilgrimages to the locations of the visits or in offerings at those locations (Hewett 1936; Watson 1937; Haile 1940: 359; Kluckhohn 1942: 60-61; Brugge 1980; Aberle 1982 [1966]: 74, 346, 347, 350; Bailey and Bailey 1982). So the issue of why such pilgrimages and offerings were made to or at Rocky Ridge at all remains to be considered.

I was told that, when consulted, Navajo elders such as the anonymous man quoted in the following account, pointed out that in previous years Navajo people would have known to arrange to have offerings made at the sacred sites in their customary-use areas rather than "flocking" to the site of the Holy Visit.

AE: "People in their areas, they should go to where the offerings are done. They know where it is. There is one over here by Big Smooth Rock, that they do, [where] they used to do the offerings. And there is several places up at the mountain that they used to do offerings," he said. "These are the places to go to! Not down there," he said.

MS: Yeah, so in other words, he was saying that people shouldn't go to Rocky Ridge to make the offerings?

AE: Yes, he said, "They shouldn't go down there!" . . . Well I guess she's [Sarah Begay] told different stories, you know, she told people that, "In your areas," you know, "You are supposed to do this because the Holy People are missing all the sacred stones [ntl'iz]," and all of this and, "You should be doing this," and all of that. And then here instead people just start going over there to see what, what had happened over there.

MS: Uh-huh.

AE: And so A.J. was saying, he said, "It is the people that are living out here, they are supposed to do it in their own places, you know, their sacred places. And even the Hopis, you know, Hopis, a lot of Hopis didn't go down there [to the Begay/Yazzie home] they did their

offerings at their offering places. You know, so that is all that I know about it. (Anonymous elder #2 1996)

The sheer volume of the pilgrimages demonstrates a tremendous need on the part of Navajo people. In personal testimonials individual Navajo gave diverse reasons for why they felt compelled to make the pilgrimage. For some a visit to the site renewed familial connections, “opened the eyes of teenagers and awakened them” to the richness of their Navajo heritage (Jones 1996). Others, such as the woman interviewed below, sought intercession on the part of the holy visitors for an ill relative. As she explained,

aw: Well, we didn’t hear it from the radio. We heard it from my brother George. . . . He visited us here and he told us about everything, and I guess they had already passed the word on within his community. I guess his in-laws went out close by that family [Begay/Yazzie] to do some type of a chore for a family and that is how the word got around. We were kind of like one of the first ones to hear by another person. And so at the time, John’s mom was ill and then John said, “Well this could be the time we do offer her a prayer,” you know?

ms: Exactly.

aw: “These Holy People can help us, you know, give her strength back and then to be able to have her health back.” So I said OK, and then we just kind of like got up one day and said, “We are going to do it.” And I took my, the mountain dirt [mountain earth bundle], the one my dad had?

ms: Uh-huh [acknowledging that I understand she is referring to the family’s mountain earth bundle, which contains several small pouches of soil from the sacred mountains, over which she has been given stewardship].

aw: We took those and we took our white corn [meal] and our corn pollen and we just headed out that way. And then we picked up my mom, we told her about it and my sister Nancy and then we just went up there and did it, you know, with hopes that things would work out. (Anonymous woman 1996)

Whatever their individual reasons, people went to great lengths to reach the location where the holy visitors stood because it had become a shrine. This site is simultaneously a shrine to Navajo identity—a place where contemporary Navajo people can reaffirm their connections to their heritage and where exclusionary practices can establish boundaries delineating “Navajoness” from non-Navajoness—and a shrine to the Holy

People—a sacred place at which reciprocal connections can be made to their powers through offerings. Although thousands of Navajo placed ntł'iz, cornmeal, pollen, or other offerings on top of the footprints left by the holy visitors, many felt that it was totally inappropriate for such offerings to be made at the site of the Holy Visit.

AE: We heard about the one over at the Ridge, but we never went there because there are a lot of people, you know, they've made different stories!

MS: Sure. What stories did you hear?

AE: Well, they said the offering was done right outside their door. And my uncle said, "You can't do that!" He said, "You have to do offerings away from the house, because you don't want people walking over it." . . . And then they were asking for money too, the people that live there that saw these two Holy People, or whatever it was. . . . And they had feasts there and they had offerings there, and right outside the door. And they said they saw footprints, and some of them said, "No, there was no footprint." And then so, they had all kinds of different stories. (Anonymous elder #2 1996)

Others believe that at the very least, the offerings being made at the footprint site should have been suspended once the white corn, turquoise, white shell, and other substances began to build up, for such excess can lead to disharmony in the Navajo world.

AW: There are a lot of other things that we heard later, so I really don't know, you know, everyone had their things to say about it. How it should have been handled, or what else should have been done, and all of that, so.

MS: Uh-huh. Well what types of things did you hear about it?

AW: Well they said that they shouldn't make offerings there, you know, I mean that is where the incident happened, they said, "You should just have had more Blessing Way ceremonies all over the reservation and then they should do some offerings in the mountains." . . . So, I understood that about a month later, a month from the day that happened?

MS: Uh-huh?

AW: They said that that pile of white corn was like maybe two feet high! At that one place! And they didn't think it was appropriate, you know? And they said, "Once that thing was piling up, they should have taken, you know, they shouldn't have done their offerings." (Anonymous woman 1996)



Elders with whom I consulted commended the fact that ceremonial practitioners made offerings at the four sacred mountains and went on to explain that Navajo people hearing of the Holy Visit should have arranged for *ntl'iz ni'nił* ceremonies to be performed, in which offerings would be made at the sacred sites in their customary-use areas, rather than traveling to the site of the Holy Visit.

MS: What is the Navajo name for the ceremony where you make those offerings?

AE: Well, we call it *ntl'iz ni'nił*. . . . And he said, "There is supposed to be, umm, a site set for it," you know?

MS: Uh-huh.

AE: "They are supposed to make a hooghan, and they are supposed to get a, the people that are related to water, you know, like *Tó'aheedlíinii* [The Water Flow Together clan].

MS: Uh-huh and how about "Bitter Water"?

AE: Yes, or Bitter Water, and then umm, what was it he told me? So, not anything that has a red. Like Red Running to Water, who is *Táchii'nii* [Red Running into the Water People clan], he said, "No, not that because red is not a good sign, you know, red is bad." And, what was it? *Tó'aheedlíinii* and *Tábqáqhá* [Water's Edge clan]. "Near the Water People." He said, "Those, that, a lady and a," well he said, "A young girl, a young boy," that haven't been, you know? That are pure still, you know. That haven't been touched or anything like that?

MS: Right.

AE: He said, "They are supposed to get those two and then they are the ones that are supposed to be, they have the prayer at night, and then in the morning, it is open to all people that they come and do their offerings, you know, they put their, their sacred stones down and then ahh, and then these two [the young girl and boy], they are the ones that are taken up to, to the mountain or where there is a spring. And, they're the ones that do the offering toward that place, not in the water, just by the water. You don't put those precious stones *in* the water, you just put it *by* the water." And, and [he] said, "Other people, they kind of stay home, just three or four go up there and they do their offerings up there. And then they come back and then they have a sing all night on these two."

MS: Hmm, so the ceremony that is done for the boy and the girl from the Near the Water or the Bitter Water clans?

AE: Uh-huh?

MS: Is that a Blessing Way?

AE: That is a Blessing Way, uh-huh. . . . My uncle said it was supposed

to have been done in homes, you know, like in our own homes with our families. (Anonymous elder #2 1996)

The issues raised by various Navajo over the appropriateness of pilgrimages to Rocky Ridge or offerings at the footprint site highlight the changing nature of Navajo beliefs and practices. Previous visitations did not result in mass pilgrimages to the sites; people simply made the requisite offerings at sacred sites in their customary-use areas or on the sacred mountains and then “went about their business.” Presently, the language and traditions are not being taught in numerous Navajo homes. As a result many contemporary Navajo simply do not know the exact locations of the sacred sites in their customary-use areas, what types of ceremonies should be performed at them, when these ceremonies may be performed, or by whom. Hence, many of those who were unclear about exactly what should be done in response to an incident such as the Holy Visit went to the site of the visit to seek guidance. The mass pilgrimages to the site and the offerings made while there demonstrate how Navajo beliefs and practices are altering to accommodate a new generation of Navajo people who lack firm foundations in traditional teachings. These are precisely the individuals to whom the message of the holy visitors was especially directed. Those who have lost touch with time-honored traditions are called upon to “return to the old ways” so that the natural order of the Navajo cosmos may be restored.

### Conclusions: The Message of 1996

*I think the message is, we are losing our language, and we are not wearing our hair as it should be. The Holy People left us ceremonies, everything that we need to know, the political, the economic knowledge. They said, “Use these and you will be all right. Lose these and it will be the end!” In Navajo we call these yeeséłkǫ́, “food you prepare for a journey.” You estimate how much water, food, you will need. They [the Holy People] said, “Here is your yeeséłkǫ́.” Somewhere along the line the United States Government gave us another yeeséłkǫ́, and now he is trying to hold that back. I think maybe what they [the Holy People] are saying is “Go back to the old ways and you will be OK.” — Walters 1996*

In response to the Holy Visit of 1996, families across the reservation engaged hataalii to perform ceremonies during which offerings were made at sacred sites; in addition thousands of Navajo made the pilgrimage to Rocky Ridge. Pilgrimages to the site of the Holy Visit and the making of offerings there did not “make sense” to those Navajo who consider themselves to be holding on to “old, old tradition,” but these actions made perfect sense to Navajo seeking a special connection with the powers of

the Holy People, a reaffirmation of Navajo identity, or guidance regarding traditional teachings. In essence these people went to Rocky Ridge because they were seeking a new sensibility in the challenging context of the altering Navajo world.

Those who stood in line for hours to hear Sarah Begay tell the story of her visitation were convinced of the authenticity of her account because it harks back to the warnings of the *Diyin Dine'é* documented in the Navajo oral histories. The messages brought by the holy visitors to Rocky Ridge in May of 1996 concern the final warning given by Changing Woman as she prepared to take her place as the inner form of the earth: "Do not forget those [songs] that I have taught you. The day you forget them will be the last, there will be no other days" (Goddard 1933: 175). The apocalyptic nature of the message is clear: if Navajo people continue on the path they seem to have chosen—abandonment of the traditions given to them by Changing Woman and the other *Diyin Dine'é* and violation of the responsibilities established in the charter between the *Nihookáá Dine'é* and the *Diyin Dine'é*—the world as they know it will cease to exist. The urgency in the message delivered by the holy visitors implies that no Navajo is exempt from it; everyone must make offerings to stabilize the relationship between the *Diyin Dine'é* and the *Nihookáá Dine'é*.

On the surface it would seem that, unlike the numerous cases documented by previous researchers (Hewett 1936; Watson 1937; Haile 1940: 359; Kluckhohn 1942: 60–61; Brugge 1980; Aberle 1982 [1966]: 74, 346, 347, 350; Bailey and Bailey 1982), this incipient movement among the Navajo holds the likelihood of being sustained because it was officially sanctioned by representatives of a centralized authority, the Navajo government. Speaker Begaye and President Albert Hale engineered the national reaction—four-hour leaves were granted to all Navajo governmental employees to enable thousands of them to make pilgrimages to the site, and the Navajo Nation Unity Day of Prayer was inaugurated on 20 June 1996, when events were broadcast over radio and television to enable thousands of individuals in remote locations to participate. This implies that perpetuation of this transformative movement might be fundamentally linked to an evolving Navajo nationalism.<sup>29</sup> But it must be recognized that President Hale and Speaker Begaye are politicians with various political motivations for what they do and say in their official capacities.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, since their influence in regard to these matters is limited in large measure to their respective terms in office, it remains to be seen whether Navajo governmental support will continue into the future. In any case, it is too soon to know for sure whether this movement will be sustained.

This is only a preliminary assessment. If the incipient movement re-

sulting from this visit proves to have efficacy for Navajo people facing the serious multidimensional stresses generated by social problems such as alcohol abuse, youth gangs, domestic violence, forced relocation, and loss of culture and traditions, as well as the environmental stresses generated by sustained drought conditions, it will endure; if not, it will cease to exist. But, we must not lose sight of the fact that, brought to Rocky Ridge by the Holy People in the springtime, the message conveyed in May of 1996 is inherently a message of hope, which holds forth the promise of cultural renewal. Perhaps for some Navajo, the pilgrimage to Rocky Ridge marked the first step on the journey back to the teachings of the Holy People.

## Notes

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- 1 This refers to a land partition mandated by the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-531) in an effort to settle the Navajo-Hopi land dispute. This dispute stems from President Chester Arthur's executive order of 1882 that granted 2.5 million acres of land around the Hopi mesas for the Hopi and "such other Indians as the Secretary of the Interior may see fit to settle thereon." Since 1891, numerous attempts have been made to reconcile

boundary conflicts between the Hopi and Navajo families living in this area by legal means. In 1962 a federal court ruled that 1.8 million acres of the 1882 reservation was jointly owned. This legislation led to mandatory livestock reductions from 1972 and the partition of land in 1974. Because partition mandated the relocation of all members of either tribe living in the area granted to the other, over ten thousand Navajo and one hundred Hopi were slated for compulsory relocation. Despite the commitment of enormous amounts of time and money (totaling nearly 350 million federal dollars) toward resolution by both tribes and the federal government, this dispute still remains unresolved. Most recently, the Navajo-Hopi Settlement Act was signed into law in October of 1996. It contains an Accommodations Agreement whereby Navajo families remaining on Hopi Partitioned Land were given the option either to sign up for relocation or to sign a seventy-five-year lease with the Hopi by 31 March 1997. According to Colbert Dayzie, executive director of the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission, by mid-July 1997 representatives of all but approximately five of the Navajo homesites (representing approximately twelve families) on Hopi Partitioned Land had either applied for relocation or signed a lease agreement (Dayzie 1997). Under the latter option, leaseholders are granted a grazing permit; use of a three-acre homesite, a maximum of ten acres of farmland, access to rangeland in their area for grazing their livestock (the exact amount is dependent on the available land in the area), and traditional use of land for diverse activities ranging from gathering herbs to visiting sacred sites; and the ability to make repairs on existing structures or to construct new ones within the homesite. The terms of the lease agreement are of concern to some of the affected Navajo people, in part because they place leaseholders and their families under Hopi criminal and civil jurisdiction while leaving issues such as probate, domestic relations, child custody, and Navajo benefits and services under Navajo jurisdiction. For further information on this complex issue, see Kammer (1980), Scudder (1982), Topper (1987), Feher-Elston (1988), J. Joe (1988), Aberle (1993), Benedek (1993), Brugge (1994), Clemmer (1995), and Schwarz (1997b), as well as the film documentaries *Broken Rainbow* (Florio and Mudd 1986) and *In the Heart of Big Mountain* (Osawa 1988).

- 2 Unlike the messages of many contemporary Native American prophets and visionaries, the message brought by the holy visitors has not been commercialized or marketed to the broader public (Geertz 1994; Eliot 1996: 92–93).
- 3 Hand trembling is one of several diagnostic methods used by Navajo people. When asked for assistance, a hand trembler washes her or his hands and forearms. Then, using one of a variety of designs and methods, pollen is sprinkled on the right forearm from the elbow along the radial margin, around the hypothenar eminence of the hand and along the palmar surface of the thumb to its tip, along each finger, and on the center of the palm. The diagnostician says a prayer to Gila Monster asking for information concerning the problem at hand. Sitting with eyes closed, the diagnostician sings one or two songs. During the song or songs, her hand begins to shake. She concentrates on the problem at hand—in this case the identity of the holy visitors—and her hand stops shaking when her mind focuses on the correct answer (Morgan 1931; Wyman 1936).
- 4 Unlike with my previous research, each person with whom I consulted about the Holy Visit, except Harry Walters of Tsaile, Arizona, opted to not have his or her name used in this publication. To maintain anonymity, fictitious names

- have been substituted for those of all Navajo people mentioned in personal narratives contained within this essay. To affirm the veracity of what they had to share, each of the individuals with whom I consulted framed his or her narrative with a qualifying clause such as “this is exactly what I was told. I did not change one word;” “By clan we were sisters;” or “My uncle told me.” The implication is that clan relatives would not distort information shared with kin and that the teller made a concerted effort to relay the information verbatim.
- 5 The best-known example of a visionary in Navajo oral history is the visionary who acquired the *Tł’ée’jǫ́*, or “Night Chant” (Matthews 1902: 159–71, 197–212; Wheelwright 1938; Sapir 1942; Spencer 1957: 155–61; Faris 1990: 35–40), but Reichard notes that the hero of the Feather Chant combines characteristics of the Gambler with those of the Visionary (1950: 68).
  - 6 Despite the fact that all representatives of non-Navajo media were banned from the site, this was a “media event.” Navajo people with whom I am acquainted mentioned hearing Navajo-language radio broadcasts in which the visitation was described and specific directives were given regarding the need for Blessing Way ceremonies to be performed and for offerings to be made on the sacred mountains and elsewhere. While I am only personally aware of the articles on the subject published in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, the *High Country News*, the *Arizona Republic*, the *Hopi Tutuveni*, and the *Navajo Times*, which are cited throughout this essay, an anonymous reviewer for *Ethnohistory* noted that “the newspaper coverage of the event was extensive, well beyond the sources cited by the author.” Interestingly, *Navajo Times* personnel pledged not to publish specific details of the event until approval was acquired from the Begay/Yazzie family and the proper ceremonies had been conducted at their homesite (*Arizona Republic*, 28 May 1996). In spite of this alleged ban, several articles in the *Navajo Times* (23 May 1996; 20 June 1996; 27 June 1996; 25 July 1996; 31 December 1996; 6 February 1997) referenced various aspects of the visit. In addition to this coverage, numerous e-mail postings circulated on the Internet.
  - 7 Interestingly, the location of the Holy Visit—Rocky Ridge, an isolated area on Hopi Partitioned Land—conforms to Victor Turner’s suggestion that pilgrimage sites tend to be “out there”—that is, spatially peripheral and located outside the direct sphere of governmental and religious administrative centers (1974: 191–96).
  - 8 It is beyond the scope of this article to attempt to summarize the vast literature on prophecy and transformative movements that has developed since publication of Mooney’s classic work. For comparative theoretical models see, for example, Linton 1943, Aberle 1959, and Wallace 1956. On the Ghost Dance specifically, see Mooney 1896; Kroeber 1904; Spier 1927; Barber 1941; Hill 1944; Kehoe 1968, 1989; Hittman 1973; Overholt 1974; Stewart 1977; DeMallie 1982; Moses 1985; Thornton 1986; and Kracht 1992. On the Prophet Dance specifically, see Spier 1935, Suttles 1957, Walker 1969, and Vibert 1995. See also Cruickshank 1994 and the essays on prophetic and revitalization movements in a special issue of *American Indian Quarterly* edited by Trafzer 1985.
  - 9 As this tale unfolds, the astute reader will note numerous parallels that can be drawn between the events following the visitation at Rocky Ridge and the development of revitalization movements documented elsewhere in the world as they are discussed by Wallace. These parallels affirm its status as an incipient revitalization movement resulting from multidimensional stresses, the

ultimate outcome of which remains to be seen. According to Wallace's model for the development of such movements, at the time of this writing, this incipient movement is in the revitalization stage. The period of revitalization, directly preceding the attainment of a new "steady state," is said to consist of six phases: (1) "mazeway" reformulation; (2) communication; (3) organization; (4) adaptation, which frequently includes resistance of various forms; (5) cultural transformation; and (6) routinization. That thus far this movement among Navajo people has conformed to the stages outlined by Wallace does not guarantee that it will become a sustained transformative movement. For, ultimately, we are left with the same dilemma as that faced by Wallace. His model has no explanatory or predictive power—it is unable to account for the fact that "many movements are abortive; their progress arrested at some intermediate point" (Wallace 1956: 278).

- 10 The fact that, despite exposure to its tenets by Paiute in 1889–90 who tried to proselytize among them, Navajo people resisted involvement in the Ghost Dance movement (Barber 1941: 666–67; Hill 1944: 525–27) demonstrates that transformative movements must be culturally appropriate or they will not be adopted. In the Navajo case, cultural prohibitions against contact with "the dead and all connected with them" circumscribed Navajo involvement in the Ghost Dance movement (Hill 1944: 525).
- 11 The mountains bounding Navajo sacred space are: Blanca Peak (east), Mount Taylor (south), San Francisco Peaks (west), and Hesperus Peak (north) (see Figure 1 for associations within Navajo cosmology) with Gobernador Knob and Huerfano Mesa at the center.
- 12 To link this prophecy to the influenza epidemic of 1918–19 does not necessarily cast it as a reaction to the incursion of Euro-Americans into the Navajo world. For, as demonstrated elsewhere (Schwarz 1995), when faced with a devastating illness such as the hantavirus outbreak of 1993, Navajo people look inward to their own history and actions for answers rather than blaming outside contagion.
- 13 The identity of the visionary in this case remains unclear. He has been alternately identified as Naakai Jaan, "Mexican John," from Black Mountain (Haile 1940: 359; Brugge 1980: 313), as Naltass Bega, "Navajo Dick," from around Mexican Water (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 209–10), as "an Indian in the Black Mountains [who] was struck by lightning and while unconscious 'saw the flood coming'; . . . [an] Indian [who] dreamed it three nights in succession . . . [or] a white man from Gallup [who] told his Indian friend about it" (Superintendent from Shiprock, as quoted in Bailey and Bailey 1982: 208). In regard to the latter claim, in a novel based on her own experiences while living on the Navajo reservation, Louisa Wetherill claims that the flood prophecy occurred in 1922 and that the story came from an elderly Navajo man from near Oljeto who was attempting to retell the story of Noah's Ark as it had been told by a missionary in the area (Gillmor and Wetherill 1953 [1934]: 234–35). The story of the flood prophecy is also a central element of Frances Gillmor's novel *Windsinger* (1976).
- 14 This elder's commentary clearly indicates that, at least in the view of some contemporary Navajo, a direct correlation exists between the imprudent actions taken by Navajo seeking refuge from the predicted flood in 1920—performing

- ceremonies to stop the “water” without knowing the procedures required to restore the proper rainfall—and the recurring drought conditions experienced henceforth in the Four Corners region.
- 15 Precedent exists in Navajo oral tradition for White Shell Woman to bring messages in dreams. For example, Gladys Reichard (1950: 496) documents an account of an incident in which White Shell Woman appeared to a young girl in a dream with an important message.
  - 16 Based on extensive ethnographic research in this area, Garrick and Roberta Bailey conclude that this woman was Mary Charley, a member of the Tódi-ch’ii’nii, “Bitter Water clan,” who lived from 1875 to 1956. After this visitation she attracted a large following. With the aid of a “talking” feather, she diagnosed the problems of patients and directed the performance of special versions of the Blessing Way ceremonies (Bailey and Bailey 1982: 474–76). Furthermore, the Baileys consider the account of the visit of White Shell Woman in 1936 to be a “confused version” of the visit by Hadahoniye’ ’Ashkii rather than a separate visitation (ibid.: 474).
  - 17 After Hadahoniye’ ’Ashkii’s first visit, many Navajo sought counsel on the matter from Hastiin Tl’aai of the Newcomb (formerly Nava), New Mexico, region. Hastiin Tl’aai refused to credit the account, claiming that the visitor was an evil spirit rather than Hadahoniye’ ’Ashkii, and many Navajo attribute his death on 2 March 1937 to his disbelief (Watson 1937: 18; Kluckhohn 1942: 60).
  - 18 Based on personal communication with Solon Kimball, David Aberle (1982 [1966]: 74) reports that these may actually have been two separate visitations that occurred during the same period. In the first instance, Jesus Christ appeared to a Navajo woman while she was out herding. In the second, a Navajo (perhaps a woman) saw a Caucasian boy dressed in velvet that she believed to be Jesus Christ. It was this visitor who claimed he would lead the Navajo out of their terrible troubles.
  - 19 According to the Baileys (1982: 477), the recipient of this vision was Mary Etcitty, a member of the *Mq’ii deeshgiizhinii* (Coyote Pass or Jemez clan), who lived from 1908 to 1979. She was a ndilnihii who was acknowledged to have had visions at different times throughout her life.
  - 20 I include information such as the following account of a visitation that was contained in an e-mail message posted on the NATCHAT list with a modicum of apprehension. Readers should note that owing to the nature of this form of communication, I was unable to scrutinize the veracity of these individual sources.
  - 21 In addition, between the time of the visit in May and August of 1996, Alfred Yazzie led pilgrimages to make offerings at each of the four sacred mountains bounding Navajo sacred space (*High Country News*, 5 August 1996). Upon completing this sequence of pilgrimages, which began with the sacred mountain of the east and concluded with offerings at the sacred mountain of the north, Alfred Yazzie shared information about the events at Rocky Ridge with reporters for *High Country News* (5 August 1996).
  - 22 Despite this posting, Hopi people are documented to have visited the site on several occasions (*Hopi Tutuveni* 24 May 1996; *Navajo Times* 6 February 1997) and other non-Caucasians reportedly visited as well (Jones 1996). By some accounts, however, non-Navajo visitors were banned from making offerings at



the site. For example, Leo Jones reports that "A Navajo woman said that her husband who is of Hispanic descent was not allowed to make offerings at the site of the Holy Visit" (1996).

- 23 A reviewer for *Ethnohistory* pointed out that he heard rumors of other visitations at undisclosed locations elsewhere in Navajo country about the time of the Rocky Ridge visitation. According to his sources, in each case, members of the concerned family purposely did not publicize the visitation to avoid being subjected to the type of "furor" experienced at Sarah Begay's home. Also, I heard rumors of a visitation in the Ramah area that allegedly took place shortly after the Rocky Ridge visitation.
- 24 Following Speaker Begaye's request, the volume of pilgrims declined but Navajo people continued to make pilgrimages to the site of the Holy Visit. At the time of this writing (July 1997) pilgrims were reportedly still going to the Begay residence, although much less frequently (Louis 1997; G. Joe 1997).
- 25 The Navajo Tribal Council declared June 18 as an official day of prayer with the intention that this would become an annual event. This date was chosen because it is the day Navajo people began their walk back from Fort Sumner in 1868. In the words of Speaker Begaye, "That's when we truly demonstrated what can be done through unity, songs, language, way of life, and mostly prayers" (*Navajo Times*, 27 June 96). The 1997 Navajo Nation Unity Day of Prayer was held on June 18 at the Window Rock Veteran's Memorial Park. According to Ray Baldwin Louis (1997), press officer for the Office of Speaker Kelsey Begaye, the 1997 event was composed of three types of prayer services. Beginning at 5:30 A.M. a traditional medicine man sang songs from the Beauty Way and offered a prayer. A dozen or more people were in attendance and KTNN personnel conducted a narrated simulcast on site. Mr. Louis estimates that upwards of 70 percent of all Navajo people tune into the radio at that hour of the morning, so many Navajo people are believed to have participated while listening to the radio broadcast. At noon, a Native American Church roadman performed a "prayer circle" which included the fifty people in attendance. A portion of this service was broadcast on KTNN. In the evening a Christian service was attended by approximately 150 people. Dozens of people called or wrote letters to Speaker Begaye to let him know that they had participated in the morning blessing from their homes. Representatives from fifteen chapters contacted Speaker Begaye to inform him that they had held prayer services on site, which were timed to coincide with the noontime service. Five chapters offered meals with their services. Mr. Louis reported hearing of numerous church services held simultaneous with the evening service.
- 26 Some vehemently opposed the overall approach of organizers of this event. For example, an ad run in the *Navajo Times* by Concerned Navajo Christians for Christ took exception with one of the central themes of the Navajo Nation Unity Day of Prayer. Members of this organization disapproved of the statement, "We are all Navajos, it doesn't matter whether we are Traditional Believers, Native American Church members or Christians we are all praying to the same God" and "It doesn't matter which approach we take . . . just so long as we all pray in unity" (27 June 1996). This ad claimed:

The Speaker and his cooperators have made various other statements which attempt to place all belief systems of mankind on the same level as

God's Word. No where in the Bible does it state that other beliefs [*sic*] systems are acceptable to God. No where in the Bible does it state we are to participate in joint prayer with other non-Bible based religious systems; or to incorporate or collaborate other non-Bible based religious systems into God's Word or Christianity. . . . As a matter of fact, the Bible calls Christians to remain separate from the other world belief systems.

Further, the Bible cautions the Christian community to be aware of "False Prophets" and "False Doctrine". If a man or woman presents himself as a person who proclaims new revelations from God, he or she is considered a Prophet. If such a person proclaims hew [*sic*] doctrine that is not in line with what the Bible teaches then he or she is a "False Prophet" and is promoting "False Doctrine". . . . If what they say does not confirm [*sic*] to the teachings of the Bible, then we as Christians must avoid participation in such activities. We must test everything that is said against God's Word to protect ourselves from being mislead [*sic*] by "False Prophets" and "False Doctrine." (*Navajo Times*, 27 June 1996)

- 27 Three radio stations (the Navajo Nation's KTTN, KGLX from Gallup, KNDN from Farmington) and two T.V. stations (local NNTV5 in Farmington and KOB in Albuquerque) broadcast the event from Window Rock (*Navajo Times*, 27 June 1996; *High Country News*, 5 August 1996).
- 28 This type of passive resistance came in the form of alternative accounts such as the following two gleaned from the Internet. In the "UFO" version, which sounds in many respects like it could be a promotional ad for an upcoming episode of the *X Files*, blue and white aliens allegedly abducted Navajo people:

Has anyone heard about the UFO that landed in the middle of the Navajo Nation? A friend told me who works with them. She said it happened about 4-5 days ago, where a UFO landed and took a few people with them. She said they saw 2 aliens, they described them [as being] smaller than humans and that one was blue and the other white. Now the land where the UFO landed is considered holy land and [?] will not let anybody enter. She also said that the FBI is demanding access to the sight [*sic*], I don't know if they let them in yet or not. (Anonymous e-mail 1996)

In what I have coined the "Magician" version, the visitors disappeared in a "puff" of smoke as if they were props in a David Copperfield trick.

End of May, near Big Mountain, just before the gathering [Sun Dance gathering in support of Navajo resisting relocation off Hopi Partitioned Land]. Dineh Holy person, grandmother, of the Bitter Water clan, woke to tell her family "They are coming." A night or two later, big wind blows around and through the hogan. Grandmother tells her family, "They are here." All go outside, where two figures stand, which grandmother recognizes as the two Talking Gods, the Hero Twins, one dressed in white, one in turquoise. They say, (paraphrase) "All the trouble you are having, the droughts and so on, are because you stopped honoring the traditions, and are not giving us enough (honor? prayer?). You must return to the traditions and do the proper ceremonies. You must tell all the people we came and said this, and we will leave a sign." The family could not look directly

at them, and had not [sic] control of their bodies. *The figures vanished in a puff of smoke.* (Gilbert 1996, emphasis added)

29 See Peter Iverson 1981 on the evolution of the Navajo Nation.

30 I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for *Ethnohistory* who cautioned me to consider the inherently political nature of President Hale's and Speaker Begaye's actions.

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